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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed and compared the classroom interactional strategies of two teachers of Catalan immersion classes and one teacher of Spanish as a native language in Spain at the kindergarten level. The theoretical framework guiding the study is based on analysis of the native-speaker/non-native-speaker distinction. Two comparisons were made: (1) the "orientation towards conversational task" set for the children by the teachers, including control and direction of the conversation, form and function of epistemic questions, and the teacher's response to communicative breakdowns, and (2) the body of interactional strategies, including confirmation checks, comprehension checks, clarification checks, repetitions of the pupil's statement, expansions, semantic correction, and metalinguistic correction. Results show that the immersion and native-language teachers had a very similar orientation to the conversational task, with most significant variations occurring between teachers and not between educational situations. Immersion teachers did formulate more redundant questions to reinforce certain structures or linguistic elements. The proportion and variety of interactional strategies was also found to be very similar among teachers. Explanations are offered. A brief bibliography is appended. (MSE)

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Conversational Interaction Strategies of Teachers in Catalan Immersion Classes

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CONVERSATIONAL INTERACTION STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS IN CATALAN IMMERSION CLASSES

JOAQUIM ARNAU

INTRODUCTION

Programs of immersion in Catalan are programs directed at Spanish-speaking children. The aim of these programs is to develop full proficiency in Catalan (L2) without detracting in any way from the pupil's proficiency in Spanish (L1). In Catalonia, Catalan and Spanish are the two official languages and about half the population speak each of these as their first language (L1). Some 70,000 Spanish-speaking children are currently enrolled in Catalan immersion programs. (ARNAU, J. AND BOADA,H. 1986).

The present study is part of a much larger evaluation of the Catalan immersion program. We carried out an analysis and comparison of the conversational interaction strategies of two teachers of Catalan immersion classes and one teacher of a Spanish L1 class at the same instructional level (kindergarten, about four years of age).

The theoretical framework which has guided the study is based on the analysis of the native speaker - non-native speaker distinction. The works of LONG (1983a, 1983b) and others postulate and describe the modifications of input which a native speaker (NS) makes to ensure comprehensibility of his message and to interpret and sustain the speech of the non-native speaker (NNS). In his study of conversations between natives (NS-NS) on the one hand, and non-natives and natives on the other (NS-NNS), Long found the following interactional strategies to be more frequent in the conversations where one participant was a non-native: questions; proportion of wh-questions; confirmation checks; comprehension checks; clarification checks; self-repetitions; repetitions and expansions of the expressions of the non-native speaker.

This theoretical framework and this analysis (foreigner talk) have also been applied in contexts of second language teaching and teaching in a second language (teacher talk).

Work carried out in the context of second language teaching has seen similarities but also differences between "foreigner talk" and "teacher talk". Teachers use more"display" than "referential" questions, ask fewer questions, their speech is more centred on the "here and now", etc... (Long and Sato, 1983); the situations are not totally comparable and the interactional modifications may depend on the type of activity, on the learning age and on the way the class is organized (Pica and Doughty, 1986); there can be variation between teachers in the way they modify the register as time goes by and in the quantity and variety of interactional adjustments they use (Håkanson, 1987).

Other works, closer to our own concerns, have analyzed the input and the interactional strategies of the teacher in regular classes where content is taught in the second language (teaching in a second language). These are classes where children with limited or zero proficiency in the L2 (basically English) learn in this language throughout or for part of the school day.

Kleifgen (1985) has carried out a diachronic comparison (at the beginning and end of the course) in a kindergarten classroom where half the children spoke a language other than English, analyzing the interaction between the teacher and four pupils with varying levels of proficiency in the L2 in which they were working. She found that the strategy of omitting important elements of the sentence and replacing them with actions declined in the teacher's speech from the beginning to the end of the course, as the linguistic ability of all the pupils progressed. She also found that the complexity of the input at the end of the course, although it had changed, continued to depend on the linguistic needs of each particular child, and that the amount of attention and number of demonstrations given depended not only on each child's linguistic needs but also on his or her differing ability to solve the tasks presented.

Ellis (1985) has also studied the progressive communicative adaptation between a teacher and two children (illiterate and with no competence in English) in conversational tasks with visual stimuli, for a period of nine months outside the regular class. He made an interesting diachronic comparison of the interactive adjustments defined by Long, the complexity of the task presented by the teacher (complexity of questions) and their response to communicative breakdown; comparison of different points in time indicated that the complexity of the task varied as much as the interactional adjustments.

Wong Fillmore (1985) carried out a longitudinal study over a three year period in classes with different proportions of pupils with limited proficiency in English. She defines a body of teacher's variables which affect acquisition of the language and academic success of the children (the way in which the classes were organized, structural characteristics of the lessons and the characteristics of teacher's speech which act as suitable input).

We know of few works which analyze the interactive strategies of teachers of immersion classes. Ireland, Gunnell and Sunterre (1980) and Chaudron (1986) conclude in their studies of French immersion classes that teachers at different levels of the school are more orientated towards the message than to the code (they only make specific reference to structural and grammatical elements of the L2 in language classes). Richards (1981), in a comparison of "the climate of the class" (based on Flanders' categories) in six immersion classes and six classes of the regular program in French, concludes that there are no differences in the level of control and focusing that the teachers exercise over the tasks, either in the cognitive climate (thinking habits that teachers induce in the pupils) or in attention to accuracy of speech. The small differences that appear occur in the following aspects, which are inter-related: teachers of immersion classes devote proportionally more time to language and its evaluation (language games) as opposed to matters of content, and the proportion of time spent speaking to that spent in silence is also greater. These, however, are small differences and not significant.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

In immersion classes and those taught in L1 Spanish, teachers and pupils communicate for mutual comprehension, but the communicative situation is different since in immersion classes the pupils initially do not know the language of instruction.

This specific situation will probably lead teachers of immersion classes to develop more and more varied interactive conversational strategies than the teacher who teaches in L1 because we assume that the initial communicative situation will create more problems for the pupils in terms of comprehension and expression of the message.

In order to research the interactional differences between the two communicative settings we have conducted two types of comparison: the first is related to the "orientation towards the conversational task" which the teachers set the children, and the second to the "strategies or adjustments of conversational interaction".

(i) The "orientation towards the conversational task" has been defined according to the following criteria :

- control and direction of the conversation, defined by the proportion of interchanges initiated by the teacher to those initiated by the pupils.
- the form and function of epistemic questions (evaluative questions in which the teacher asks for information on the content of the lesson or activity). The following comparisons are included:
  - proportion of "descriptive" to "cognitive" questions (reasoning, projection, forecasting, imagination, Tough categories
  - proportion of "open" questions (questions where a high degree of flexibility of information can be given) to "closed" questions (where semantically only one answer is possible).
  - proportion of "clue" questions, those which already have a part of the information needed for the child to answer ("or" questions, questions requiring a "yes/no" response,

building questions)

- "redundant" questions, previously formed questions that require information which has already been negotiated in previous interchanges.

- The teacher's response to communicative breakdowns, defined by the reaction of the teacher to an unanswered question or a semantically inadequate answer (non-linguistic). This includes three possible strategies that the teacher can put into operation (Ellis, op. cit.).
  - "accepts" (the teacher accepts the pupil's answer although it is inadequate.
  - "supplies" (the teacher gives the required information that the pupil needs).
  - "repairs" (the teacher sets in motion the necessary interactional adjustments which lead the pupil or pupils to express an appropriate comment).

We hypothesize that teachers of immersion classes, in relation to teachers of L1:

- exercise greater control over the subject, initiate more interchange by questioning so as to maintain the conversation and to make the pupils express themselves.
- formulate more "descriptive" than "cognitive" questions because they are more concerned that the pupils learn the code.
- formulate more "closed" and "clue" questions, which are easier to answer by a supposedly less competent speaker who has fewer linguistic resources.
- formulate more "redundant" questions in an attempt to reinforce particular structures or vocabulary in the L2.
- faced with a communicative breakdown, would use tactics to "accept" or "supply" the pupil's message with information and would do less "repairing"; they would be less demanding with the pupils' contributions.

(ii) The second level of analysis refers to the body of "interactional strategies" as described by Long (op. cit.) in his studies of NS-NNS conversation and also confirmed in studies of "teacher talk".

The interactional strategies analysed are as follows:

- Confirmation checks: when the teacher repeats the whole or part of the pupil's expression with intonational emphasis so as to make sure that he has understood the speaker's expression adequately.
- Comprehension checks: questions put by the teacher to confirm that the pupil is following what he is saying ("Do you understand?", "Right?", "OK?").
- Clarification checks: the teacher makes the pupil repeat his previous expression because it is incorrect or incomplete; this may take an interrogative form ("What did you say?") or an imperative form ("Repeat that, please!").
- Repetitions of the pupil's statement: Total or partial repetitions of the previous expression without adding any new semantic information.
- Expansions: The teacher expands the context of the pupil's previous expression, completing any linguistic elements that are lacking or even adding new semantic information.
- Semantic correction: repetition of the pupil's previous expression with the correction of some inadequate semantic element.
- Metalinguistic correction: the teacher responds to a pupil's inadequate expression from the point of view of the code, giving explanations of the language at a formal level or of the type "in Catalan you say... "

On the basis of the works cited in the Introduction, we hypothesize that immersion class teachers would produce a larger quantity and variety of the adjustments or strategies we have listed above in order to facilitate comprehension, maintain the conversation and teach the L2.

METHODOLOGY

Setting and classroom data

We analysed conversational data taken over one year from three classes (kindergarten, 4 years of age) of Spanish-speaking children which form part of our overall project - two classes of Catalan Immersion and one class where Spanish (L1) is the language of instruction.

The schoolchildren are from a low social level and live in predominantly Spanish-speaking areas. We observed and videotaped group lessons of oral expression every two weeks during the school year. The present analysis is based on eight activities which were recorded sequentially and which include three stories, three conversations about a trip or visit and two conversations with visual assistance. All of the activities involved large groups. Each activity lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Some criteria of analysis of the conversational data

- With the aim of balancing all the activities we have analysed the first 60 "exchanges" (SINCLAIR AND COULTHARD).
- The proportion of "repetitions", "expansions" and "corrections" has been determined in relation to the pupil's previous expressions. The strategies of this type which appear have been counted from the moment when the pupil formulates the expression to the point when the teacher considers it has been negotiated or when another pupil intervenes. A repetition is considered to be any reproduction by the teacher of the pupil's previous expression in whatever form it was produced (L1, L2 or code-switching).
- The analysis of the teacher's response to communicative breakdown has been carried out by considering only the instructional exchanges directed initially at only one pupil.
- The proportion of confirmation, comprehension and clarification checks (echo questions) has been determined in relation to epistemic questions (evaluative).

Table II. Interactional strategies.
Comparison of immersion and L1 teachers.

	Immersion I		L1				Immersion II		L1			
	N	%	N	%			N	%	N	%	Z	
1.- Echoic questions												
- Confirmation checks	2	0.71	8	2.2	1.55	n.s.	10	3.9			1.2	n.s.
- Clarification checks	7	2.49	7	1.9	0.51	n.s.	8	3.1			1.05	n.s.
- Comprehension checks	2	0.71	0	-	1.61	n.s.	-	-			-	n.s.
- Total	11	3.91	15	4.1	0.12	n.s.	18	7			1.62	n.s.
2.- Repetitions	154	52.7	184	51.6	0.27	n.s.	91	36.4			3.7	0.001
3.- Expansions	27	9.2	6	1.68	4.37	0.001	11	4.4			2	0.05
4.- Semantic correction	6	2.05	0	0	2.6	0.01	1	0.4			0.16	n.s.
5.- Metalinguistic correction	1	0.34	0	0	1.3	n.s.	0	0				n.s.

RESULTS

Table I. Conversational orientation.
Comparison of immersion and L1 teachers.

	Immersion I		L1				Immersion II		L1			
	N	%	N	%	Z		N	%	N	%	Z	
1. **Control of the topic**												
Exchanges initiated by teacher	288	83.5	268	91.5	2.99	0.01	200	82			3.2	0.002
Exchanges initiated by pupils	57	16.5	25	8.5			44	18				
2. **Form and function of questions**												
- Descriptive	276	98.2	338	93.8	2.72	0.01	248	96.8			1.68	n.s.
- Cognitive	5	1.8	22	6.2			8	3.2				
- Closed	256	91.1	318	88.3	1.1	n.s.	239	93.3			2.03	0.05
- Open	25	8.9	42	11.7			17	6.7				
- Clue	81	28.8	96	26.6	0.2	n.s.	62	24.2			0.68	n.s.
- Redundant	58	20.6	6	1.6	8.4	0.001	53	20.7			7.51	0.001
3. **Response to communicative breakdown**												
- Repairs	39	95.1	66	86.8	1.38	n.s.	36	94.7			1.27	n.s.
- Supplies	0	-	3	3.9	1.43	n.s.	0	-			1.41	n.s.
- Accepts	2	4.9	7	9.2	1.1	n.s.	2	5.3			0.88	n.s.

Table III. Comparisons between the immersion teachers which show significance.

	Immersion I		Immersion II		Z	
	N	%	N	%		
- confirmation checks	2	0.71	10	3.9	2.63	0.01
- repetitions	154	52.7	91	36.4	3.8	0.001
- expansions	27	9.2	11	4.4	2.18	0.005
- semantic corrections	6	2.05	1	0.4	1.92	0.05

The results of Table I show that the three teachers exercise considerable control over the topic, but against expectations it is the L1 teacher who exercises significantly greater control. An analysis of the different activities leads us to consider that control of the topic also depends on the characteristics of these. A conversation about a visit or a school party produces more initiatives of participation from the pupils than a conversation about an uninteresting story or unexciting visuals. In general, the results concerning control of the topic coincide with those of other works on discourse carried in schools with children of the same age (Wells 1987).

The three teachers formulate predominantly "descriptive" and "closed" questions. The statistical significance does not show a consistent pattern since the L1 teacher differs significantly in each case from one of the immersion teachers but not from the other. There are no significant differences in the proportion of "clues" which the three teachers use. We can see the large prroportion of "clue" questions which all of them ask (one in every five questions). The Immersion II and the L1 teachers tend mainly to formulate "clue" questions of the "or" or "yes/no" type, while the Immersion I teacher mainly formulates "building questions" (questions for completion). There is a tendency in all three teachers to address more "clue" questions to pupils whom they assume have less interactional and communicative competence.

The most important significant differences between the Immersion teachers and the L1 teacher appear in "redundant questions". One out of every five questions put by the Immersion teachers is redundant, whereas the L1 teacher only resorts to these very exceptionally. "Redundant questions" do not show a uniform pattern of distribution across different activities; the teachers use them in those activities where there seems to be a more deliberate attempt to teach the language (stories, conversations with visuals) and are rare in activities which are more centred on communication (visit and school party).

There are no significant differences between the teachers in the"response to communicative breakdown". When a pupil does not respond, or the response is semantically inadequate, the teachers try to repair communication by means of a set of strategies (tactics according to Long) which attempt to lead the children themselves to the appropriate meaning. The most frequent "tactic" in the three schools is the "clue", which may adopt the form previously described or may be any other question which focuses the pupil's attention in the desired direction (focusing questions).

The results in Table II show that the proportion of "echoic questions" is very low, and that there are no differences between the immersion teachers and the L1 teacher. It is interesting to note that the three teachers make similar use of "confirmation and clarification checks". These interactional strategies appear when the pupil produces an expression in his or her own language, which is semantically adequate but with a code error, or when all or part of an expression has not been understood (due to problems of tone of voice, articulatory difficulties, etc.). If the pupil expresses himself adequately in L1, with code errors in L2 or with"code switching", the immersion teachers accept the expression, and what they usually do is repeat it correctly in L2 (repetition).

The teachers' input shows a high proportion of "repetitions" of pupils' expressions. This proportion does not differ statistically between the Immersion I teacher and the L1 teacher, but it is significantly lower in the case of the Immersion II teacher. Our explanation

of this difference is that in this teacher's class there were sometimes discipline problems, forcing the teacher to use attention-directing devices, thus losing some opportunities to repeat what a pupil had said. "Repetitions" in the L1 class give a feeling of support for the pupil's expression, but in the immersion classes they also have the important function of permitting a pupil to contrast an L1 expression with the model of language which is being learnt.

"Expansions" are not very frequent, but the Immersion teachers produce a significantly greater number of them. Their character is more semantic (additional information) than linguistic. This is because the pupil rarely expresses himself in a "restricted" form of language, since he can always express himself in his own language.

"Semantic corrections" and "metalinguistic corrections" are also very infrequent. The former are only significant in one situation (Immersion I).

The results in Table III show that there are differences between the two Immersion teachers as well in some of the variables analyzed (confirmation checks, repetitions, expansions, semantic corrections). In addition to "idiosyncratic" features of the teachers or of the class situations (as in the case of the repetitions) the presence of the other strategies logically depends on the type of expression produced by the pupils, and this may also be the origin of differences.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Immersion teachers and the L1 teacher have a very similar "orientation to the conversational task". There are no significant differences between them either in the proportion of "clues" or in the response to "communicative breakdown". Moderately significant differences are found in the variables "control pf topic", "cognitive-descriptive questions" and "open-closed questions", but these differences are between teachers and not between the two educational situations. The most important significant difference is that related to the greater proportion of "redundant questions" formulated by the Immersion teachers in an attempt to reinforce certain structures or linguistic elements. With

this strategy they show a greater "concern with the code", a concern which depends, however, on the nature of the activity.

The proportion and variety of "interactional strategies" is also very similar. There are no significant differences in "echoic questions". The only moderately significant differences occur in the case of "expansions" in favour of the Immersion teachers. In the case of the other "interactional strategies" the differences seem to depend more on "idiosyncratic"differences between the teachers or the pupils than on the two different educational situations.

We would explain the similarities in the "conversational interaction strategies", which exist despite the fact that in the immersion situation the pupils are linguistically less competent in the language used for teaching, as follows:

- the three teachers are all facing an interlocutor with the same characteristics (4 years old, going to school, from a low-level social background) which probably leads them to use only simple conversation, making few cognitive and linguistic demands and with the help of numerous supports (clues, repetitions, etc.).
- the pupils can express themselves in their own language or with whatever L2 resources they have available at a given moment. The situation that results is totally different from that of NS-NNS conversation, from that of "Teaching a Second Language", and even from those situations of "teaching in a second language" which were commented on earlier. In such situations the NNS has to produce expressions in L2 right from the beginning if he wants to maintain a minimum of conversation with the interlocutor. In the immersion situation, on the other hand, the pupil can and does express himself in his own language, so that given a minimum of comprehension the conversation can run as fluently as in L1 teaching. The teachers, for their part, accept an expression in either of the languages because

they are"orientated to the message, not to the code".

- the code is used within a comprehensible context where pupils and teachers talk about things that are present, with . . visual support, . or about shared experiences. The discourse similarly has a high degree of "continuity" and therefore contains few linguistic surprises, since the same activity is worked on over different sessions.
- the similarity or closeness between two languages such as Catalan or Spanish may also be a factor facilitating comprehension.

We have described some "interactional strategies" which belong to certain very specific activities in the school context, which form only a small part of this context. Other situations (e.g. mathematics) could cause different kinds of adjustments among the teachers.

Our focus has only allowed us to detect some very general action strategies, and a time contrast analysis such as is discussed in other works (Ellis, Kleifgen op. cit.) could probably capture certain more subtle differences in the teachers' input.

The "interactional effort" on the part of the teachers seems to be sufficient for the pupils to communicate from the first moment and to acquire the L2 by a natural and unforced process.

We should note, however, that the activities presented by the teachers vary in their "communicative efficacy" (in their encouragement of speech and the participation of pupils). In general, in most of the activities the pupils are more "performers" than "explorers in and through language" in the sense defined by Lindfors (1983). The pupils' participation is mostly limited to responding. Without wishing to generalize from observations made in a very specific context to all situations in the curriculum, we would like to note that an improvement in conversational efficiency for learning in L2 should consider "collaborative talk" situations, genuine conversations where pupils play a more active role in the creation of meaning (Wells, op. cit.).

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